



The effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety: A qualitative study

Aileene May R Flores, Geronimo S Obaob

Cebu Normal University, Faculty of Graduate Studies, College of Teacher Education, Cebu, Philippines

Abstract

This is a qualitative research study that descriptively discovered the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety, which was being addressed by determining (1) the teachers' attitudes towards students in terms of their English speaking performance and English speaking anxiety, (2) and students' feelings about their teachers' attitudes during their English speaking performance. An interview questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions was utilized to interview the 15 student and 6 teacher participants of this study, who are currently connected from the two prestigious universities in Cebu, Philippines. The results of the interview yielded the following effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety in a summary: (a) students get agitated during their English speaking performance when they perceive their teachers as strict, unapproachable, perfectionist, and such, (b) teachers' student-friendly approach and interactive instructional strategies help alleviate students' English speaking anxiety, and (c) teachers as stern and firm monitors of students' language use make students more conscious of themselves that drives them to be extensively scared of committing mistakes and not meeting their teachers' expectations. Out from the gathered verbal data and results, this study concluded that teachers are indeed major determinants of students' English speaking anxiety. The exhibited behavioral and instructional attitudes of teachers take a large sector in the rise of students' fear and apprehension in using the target language orally, which ripples on their English speaking performance. Therefore, a list of effective teaching strategies in alleviating students' English speaking anxiety was developed by the researcher as an output of the study.

Keywords: english speaking anxiety, english speaking performance, teachers' attitudes

Introduction

Emotional quotient is a substantial predictor of academic achievement, including oral communication performance (Alghorbany & Hamzah, 2020) ^[1]. In the context of Malaysia, researchers have affirmed that Iranian EFL learners' anxiety has been the most affective factor that gives them language learning hurdles (Azarfam & Baki, 2012) ^[2]. Ihmeideh & AL-OMARI (2010) cited in their study that effective and efficient communication by students in present day's classroom is halfway dependent upon the teachers being sensitive and attentive enough to their students' physical and emotional problems. Blazar and Kraft revealed in their study entitled, "Teacher and Teaching Effects on Students' Attitudes and Behaviors", that teachers hold massive effects on self-reported measures of students' happiness, self-efficacy, and behavior in class. This just pertains to the fact that teachers play the major role in holding students' learning experiences and academic achievements since they are the implementers of education.

Yet, according to the result of the study of Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015), it showed that high anxiety affected the students' achievement. Thus, with these two interrelated results of the aforementioned studies, this urged the researcher to conduct a study about the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety.

In addition, it is vital to know how the teachers, specifically English teachers, give impact on the anxious learners whose oral communication is immensely downgraded for the reason that teachers are the primary determinants in shaping and affecting the ambiance of learning environment. Although there is already sufficient existing literature about studying students' language anxiety, there is still a scarcity of published materials on how the teachers in the Philippines specifically play a role or cause impact to students' fear towards the use of language, specifically English speaking anxiety.

Research Problem

This study determined the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety.

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards students in terms of:
 1. English speaking performance
 2. English speaking anxiety
2. How do the students feel about the teachers' attitudes during their English speaking performance?
3. What are the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety?
4. Based on the results, what output can be proposed?

Methodology of Research

Research design

This is a qualitative research study that made use of the descriptive method. Studying the language anxiety of the students have to be investigated using an approach that can

obtain descriptive information from the concerned variables which are not easily assessed with the use of empirical research.

Participants

The participants of this study were the teachers and students from the two prestigious universities in Cebu. A convenient sampling technique was employed wherein the researcher gathered 15 first year education students and 10 English teachers who were available online. All student participants were first year Education students from the two prestigious universities in Cebu with the following specific majors: BSNE and BSEd-English. There were 5 BSNE students and 10 BSEd- English students, which made the sum of 15 student participants. All teacher participants were English teachers from the same universities with the students in order to yield more reliable and valid results. Generally, there were 6 teacher participants and all of them were teaching in tertiary level for 1-5 years.

Instrument

The study used interview questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions. Teachers' interview questionnaire was consist of six open-ended questions that targeted on the teachers' attitudes towards students in terms of English speaking performance and students' exhibited English speaking anxiety. On the other side, students' interview questionnaire was comprised of 9 questions that tackled their behavior or feeling towards teachers' attitudes during their English speaking performance, and the impact of teachers' attitudes on their English speaking anxiety.

Procedure for data collection and data analysis

The study was based on the analysis of the interview questionnaires of the two groups of participants showing the three major areas: (1) teachers' attitudes towards students' English speaking performance, (2) teachers' attitudes towards students' English speaking anxiety, and (3) students' feelings about their teachers' attitudes during their English speaking performance. 15 education students and 5 English teachers from the two universities in Cebu were chosen conveniently to answer the interview questionnaire that was sent via Fb messenger. Then, the responses were analyzed qualitatively with accordance to the mentioned three major areas and collectively summarized the verbal data in relation to the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety, which was the main purpose of this study.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' attitudes towards students' English speaking performance

All of the teacher participants claimed that they are just guide on the side during English speaking activities in the classroom, which means that students are in the limelight who take over the spot once it's their turn to speak. Teachers' responses yield immense and firm emphasis on the use of English language during speaking performances in an English class and all of them have pressed on the use of English Only Policy (EOP) in class. However, it can't be denied that not all students are linguistically inclined, thus students need a push from external circle to build their will to perform the language and Raja (2017) cited in his study that not all people are born to be good at speaking, but

rather they are trained to become one. Teachers' attention and consideration on language learners' anxiety is indeed essential in order to provide them a succor in reaching the intended performance goals in the target language (Hashemi; cited in Tanveer, 2007). So, with regard to this, majority of the teachers responded in the interview that they give motivation and positive reinforcement to their students during the times when students are asked to perform orally in class using the English language, most importantly when they observe that a student shows troubled actions caused by intrinsic factors. Moreover, some teachers have accentuated the essence of the law of readiness wherein they give ample time to the students to think, to organize the thoughts they have in mind, and to get themselves ready before giving the floor to them.

Teachers' attitudes towards students' English speaking anxiety

One of the long running major issues in second language learning is the language anxiety, specifically the oral production. This kind of apprehensiveness is one of the major issues for the academic achievement of the students as it was found out in the study of Halder (2018) ^[7] that those students who have decreased their academic achievement showed a higher level of English language anxiety. With regard to this, all of the teachers' responses in the interview with regard to the students' English speaking anxiety boil down on the power of radiating positive and relaxing energy to the students to instill a low-filtered ambiance to them. In short, teachers touch the affective side of the students by motivating and encouraging them to express themselves freely using the language without pressuring themselves and minding the mistakes that they will be committed all along their English speaking performance. Since it is really inevitable that students will have a hard time to speak their thoughts with the use of English language alone, some of the teacher participants authorize their students to do a little bit of code-switching and then recompose their thoughts to let their students feel at ease when sharing their ideas orally in class. All of the concerned teachers in the interview have shown positive and gentle attitudes in their answers when it comes to the way they address students' English speaking anxiety. Some teachers have expressed that they lighten the mood of the class by cracking some jokes or prompts to energize the students. Also, when it comes to instructional approach, majority of the teachers have written that giving tips and strategies in presenting orally using the target language is a useful way to help students alleviate their English speaking anxiety.

Students' feeling about their teachers' attitudes during their English speaking performance

All of the student participants have professed that they can't help to feel anxious and nervous whenever they speak English in front of the class. Most of the students have acclaimed that their anxiety stems from the negative pressure they have set on themselves, their own preconceived judgment on their performance, and their fear of committing mistakes. All of these aforementioned anxiety triggers have close contact to how teachers approach and set the vibe of the classroom since majority of the students responded in the interview that they just feel these emotions depending on how they see their teachers – if they

are strict, unapproachable, intimidating, approachable, easy-going, calm, and etc. Henceforth, teachers' well-set, unwavering expectations for behavior and performance induce the students to see them as strict and such, which causes them to feel the emotional triggers of their English speaking anxiety. Moreover, the student participants have included their bad experience with their English teachers who gave them negative feedback and pointed out their mistakes in an inappropriate way, which lowered their confidence and created their fright in speaking English in a crowd. In short, students are so sensitive to the teachers' actions and behaviors that even their facial expressions and gestures are perceived by their own understanding and interpretation.

Effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety

The results of the conducted interview have yielded that teachers are major determinants of the students' anxiety towards using English orally, thus the following are the summarized effects of teachers' attitudes on students' English speaking anxiety taken from the interview results:

1. **Students get agitated during their English speaking performance when they perceive their teachers as strict, perfectionist, and such.** Students feel disturbed during their oral performance because they are intimidated by the reaction and thinking of their external circles and one of these are their teachers. Though the participants are education students, they can't still cease to feel anxious and afraid during their speaking activities and it's because the triggers of these disturbing emotions are emerging not only from themselves, but also from extrinsic factors – which they have no control.
2. **Teachers' student-friendly approach and interactive instructional strategies help alleviate students' English speaking anxiety.** The student participants have admitted that it is not just the presence of their teachers that can disturb their anxiety, but also the kind of strategies and activities they employ in class. About 95% of the student respondents have claimed that individual English speaking performances are quite more fearsome to them compared to pair and group performances for the reason that their teacher's attention and focus is not directed to the only one student. Also, majority of the student respondents find fun activities during the language instruction effective in appeasing the negative and disturbing emotions they feel during speaking. In addition, all of the student respondents have retorted that their teachers' approachable vibe and their genuine motivation and encouragement can immensely help them to conquer their anxiety when speaking orally in English. The positive attitude of the teachers created a positive influence on students' attitudes all throughout the language learning since students consider their teachers as model figures, who played a massive role in building their motivation and positive mindset towards learning English (Massri, 2020).
3. **Teachers as stern and firm monitors of students' language use make students more conscious of themselves that drives them to be extensively scared of committing mistakes and not meeting their teachers' expectations.** All of the students in the

interview have responded that one of the major causes of their English speaking anxiety is because they are afraid of receiving unwanted corrections from their teachers. But, students should not be afraid of making mistakes while learning because errors are part of their learning process and corrections from the teachers are part of their teaching process (Koni E. & Leka H, 2015) ^[21]. It is the responsibility of the English teachers to correct students, but in an appropriate and gentle manner – that's why there is a constructive feedback that gives corrective measures, support, and encouragement to the students as a way to heighten their learning and improve their performance. Henceforth, some student participants have suggested that teachers should give corrections in a manner that they will not be put in embarrassment.

Conclusion

Teachers are indeed major determinants of students' English speaking anxiety. The exhibited behavioral and instructional attitudes of teachers take a large sector in the rise of students' fear and apprehension in using the target language orally. This negative attitude on the language use ripples on the students' English speaking performance since previous studies found out that there is a strong relationship between language anxiety and students' achievement and performance in language learning (Sadiq; cited in Horwitz et. al., 1986).

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